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Moving the Curtis House



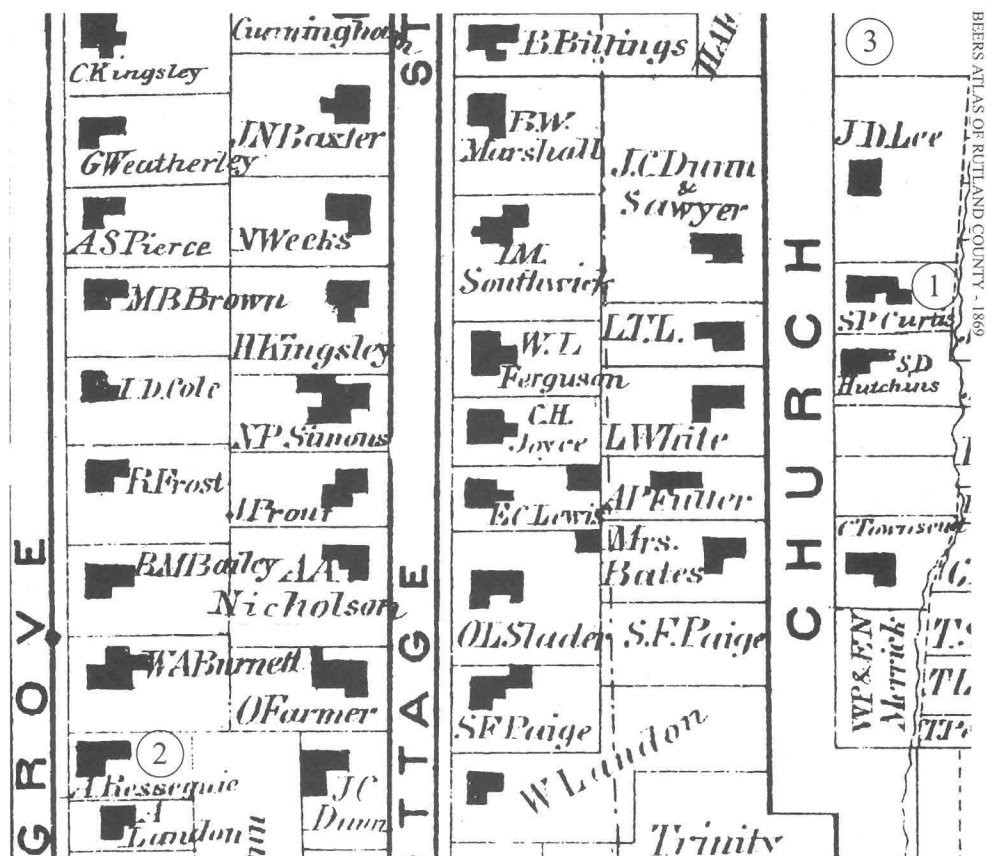
RUTLAND IN RETROSPECT

The winter sleigh scene in the early 20th Century offers a wonderful view of the Samuel P. Curtis house in the center background. This house was moved to make room for the new Montgomery Ward store in 1929. The occupants of the sleigh were (l. to r.) Mrs. George E. Royce, Miss Clara J. Squier, Helen Royce and Jack Royce. The driver was probably Frank Wilkinson. The corner of the porch of the Royce house at 29 Grove Street, now the Knights of Columbus, is at the extreme left.

About the Author

Helen K. Davidson is president of the Rutland Historical Society. She is a graduate of Notre Dame College, Manchester, New Hampshire. After 15 years employment with the State of Vermont, Helen retired. She and her husband live in Rutland City. While raising her family she was involved in many school, church and civic volunteer programs. With her husband Jim, she co-edited a previous *Quarterly*, "Rutland Murder Mystery - 1874." Helen writes a weekly column, "Tidbits From Then and Now", for the Society in *Sam's Good News*, a local weekly paper.

This story of the moving of a huge house began as a possible newspaper column. It soon developed into a full blown *Quarterly*. The many pictures, details and the importance of the moving of this building deserved a more complete exposure than a column. Thus "Moving the Curtis House" was born.



In 1868, the Curtis Family moved to a Church Street home (1) In 1869 they moved to Grove Street (2) In 1883 the Grove Street house was sold and moved to Church Street (3) to make room for a "fine" new house.

Moving the Curtis House

by Helen K. Davidson

The moving of houses was not an unusual event in the early 20th Century. A house could be moved to a new location to make room for new construction or any other purpose.

Houses were moved from Convent Avenue to River Street so that Mount Saint Joseph Academy could be extended. The Sheldon house on Nichols Street was moved to the corner of the property to make room for the expansion of what is fondly referred to as the "Old Rutland Hospital".

The most memorable moving of a house in Rutland took place in 1929. It was located at 28 Merchants Row and had been built in 1883 by Samuel P. Curtis.

Samuel Parker Curtis was born to Samuel P. Curtis and Clarisse [Wescott] Curtis on 1 April 1842 in Clarendon, Vermont. He married Amelia Pepper in 1866 and, on moving to Rutland in 1868, they lived on Church Street. They became parents of a boy and two girls.

Samuel became one of the city's pioneer coal dealers. He developed his business at 28 Evelyn Street as a wholesale and retail dealer in flour, grain, meal, feed, baled hay, lime, cement, grass seed, marble dust etc. as well as Cumberland, Lehigh and Lackawanna Coal. Along with Amos C. Bates, Samuel carried on many sales of land during the late 19th and early 20th Centuries.

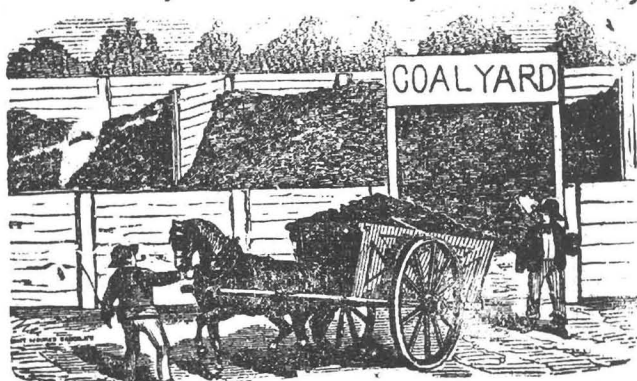
SAMUEL P. CURTIS, WHOLESALE AND RETAIL DEALER IN Flour, Grain, Meal, Feed,

Baled Hay, Lime, Cement, Grass Seed, Marble Dust, etc.

CUMBERLAND, LEHIGH
& LACKAWANNA

COAL

EVELYN ST.,
RUTLAND, VERMONT.



RUTLAND DIRECTORY 1884-85

Coal was the primary fuel for heating many homes and for fueling the steam engines that ran local industries. The Curtis facilities were located on the south side of Evelyn Street next to the railroad yard.

This was not the first time that Mr. Curtis had caused a house to be moved from this site.


On April 11, 1883 Col. D.L. Morgan purchased the Samuel P. Curtis house located at 6 Grove Street. Col. Morgan, a retired Civil War veteran who was known as Colonel D.L. Morgan, planned to move the Curtis house to his lot on the corner of Church and Williams Streets where he would use it as a tenement house. Mr. Curtis had purchased this 15-room house in 1869-70 and was now selling the house to make room for a fine dwelling that he intended to build there.

Apparently moving the house did not go as smoothly as planned for on 14 April Leonard Gee, who was superintendent of the house moving, had one of the bones of his leg broken when a chain snapped causing one of the pieces fly against his leg. Dr. Fox was called to treat the fracture.

By 19 April, S.P. Curtis began laying the foundation for his new house on Grove Street. Meanwhile, since their house had been moved, the Curtis family consisting of his wife Amelia (Pepper), son and two daughters moved into M.J. Perkins' apartment house at the corner of Grove and Spring [now State] Street. On 25 June there was a fire at M.J. Perkins' house. Four families, including the S.P. Curtis' family, who occupied the house were displaced by the fire.

The house that Mr. Curtis was building consisted of 24 rooms in the French Second Empire style, resplendent with bay windows, towers and a Mansard roof. In 1925, Merchants Row was extended beyond West Street to State Street thus making a change of address for Samuel Curtis' home to 28 Merchants Row.

S. P. CURTIS.
H. E. CURTIS.



Samuel P. Curtis & Son

WHOLESALE & RETAIL DEALERS IN
 COAL, FLOUR, MEAL, FEED, Baled Hay, Lime, Cement,
 GRAIN, PLASTER, GRASS SEED, CATTLE, ROCK & DAIRY SALT.

TERMS (ASH.
MILL AGENTS FOR
GLEN FALLS
PORTLAND CEMENT
FOR
SOUTHERN
VT.

Rutland, Vt. Sept 28 1905

Sold to Mr. W. S. Tuttle

May 30	To 1 ton chest coal		675	✓
July 1	" 1350 ston coal	466	4 Bbls Limestone 4.60	926 ✓
1	" 1 Bbl Port Cement	1.85	4 Bags 4.00	22.5 ✓
7	" 2 Bbls Limestone	2.80	1 Bbl Cement 4.00	4.55 ✓

Samuel P. Curtis & Son's statement to W.S. Tuttle for coal in 1905.



A view of Evelyn Street to the northwest. The third building to the right is the S.P. Curtis & Son building.

The family business on Evelyn Street thrived and Samuel's son Herbert became a partner in the business that became known as Samuel P. Curtis and Son.

Herbert resided on Washington Street with his family. Samuel's wife Amelia died in 1922 at the age of 74. Samuel continued to live in his elegant house with his daughter Mabel until his death on 7 December 1928, at age 86. He was survived by his daughters, C. Mabel and Mrs. Charles P. Hutchins of Newton, Massachusetts, and his son Herbert.

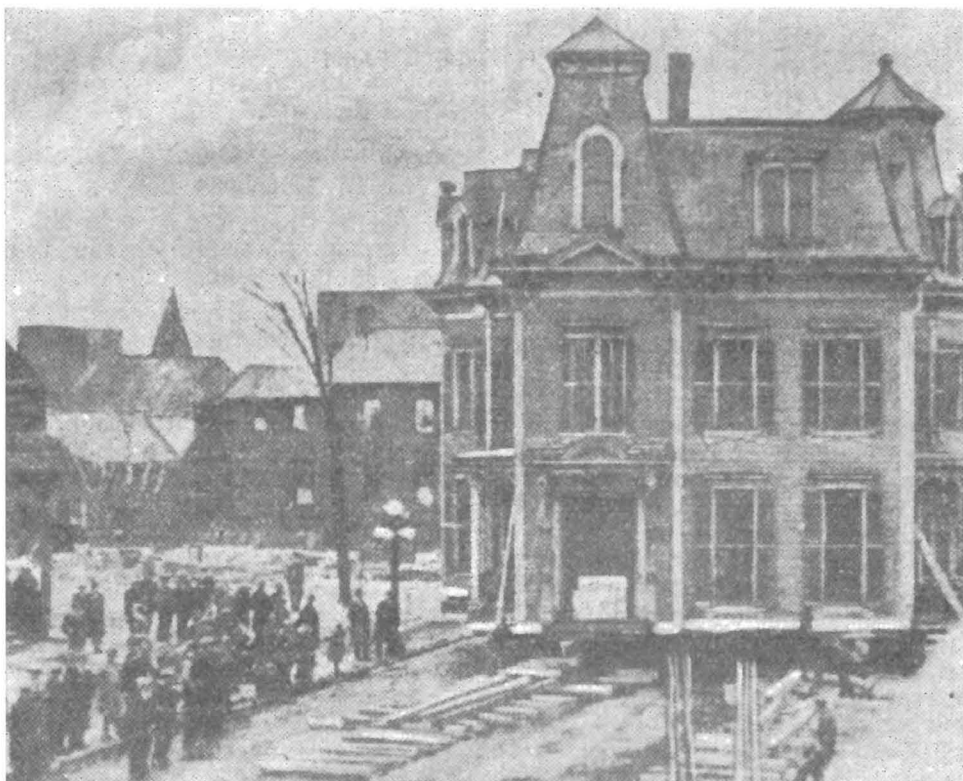
On 21 January 1929, one of Rutland's oldest estates changed hands when the house and property at 28 Merchants Row, owned by the late Samuel P. Curtis, was sold to G.E.L. Badlam of Center Street for approximately \$30,000. The Montgomery Ward Company of Chicago had sent their officials to look over the site and found it the most desirable in the city for the location of their big store. Previously it had been discovered that there were no buildings available in the city, which would be able to give the branch store of the mail order firm the floor space that would be needed in carrying on their business. The officials noted that nearly 100 persons would be employed in the new store and that local merchants would see increased trade with the scores of persons who had never come to the city before. After weeks of secret dickering and activity, the important announcement of the firm's plan to establish in Rutland was made public by Mr. Badlam.

Here the story of the moving of the Curtis house becomes quite fascinating as well as exasperating for many people, and the event was closely chronicled in the newspapers of March 1929.

On 19 January 1929 Mr. Badlam announced that he was moving the 50-year old house to make room for a building he would rent to Montgomery Ward Company of Chicago. By 13 February 1929, Miss Mabel Curtis had moved from her home at 28 Merchants Row to 58 North Main Street. Then on Wednesday 16 February Rutland citizens were surprised at the announcement that Mr. Badlam had also purchased the land from 20-24 Merchants Row from the Rutland Council of the Knights of Columbus for approximately \$35,000. Signs of the increasing value in Rutland real estate were marked by this sale. In 1917, the Knights of Columbus purchased the same property for approximately \$7,800. They had intended to use the property as a site for a clubhouse. In 1919 they abandoned that plan when they purchased the house of the late G.E. Royce at 21 Merchants Row for their lodge. The purchase of the property along with the Samuel Curtis property at 28 Merchants Row gave Mr. Badlam a frontage of 154 feet on that street, the largest of any real estate holder. He had



A view looking north on Grove Street from West Street in 1911. The Curtis house can be seen just beyond the last tall commercial block on the right.



The Curtis house is shown as it started on its rather sensational trip up Merchants Row on 3 March 1929. Crowds gathered to see workmen engaged in one of the largest moving jobs ever undertaken in Rutland.

not decided yet what type of business might be located there. Mr. Badlam had purchased a lot at the corner of Grove Street and Park Avenue from Mrs. Weir and intended to move the Curtis House there.

On 3 March 1929, John Moran of Fitchburg, Massachusetts, the hired contractor and mover of heavy objects was heard to say, "If the weather breaks right, we'll start her off Monday. If not, we'll wait. It doesn't pay to risk one of these famous Vermont floods with this baby and the streets must be absolutely dry."

The 200-ton house was ready to begin its 30-hour "peregrination" to its resting place on Grove Street. Its journey was chaperoned by a crew of trained men who brought two freight cars full of equipment to do the job. The same crew had recently moved an 85-foot chimney without spilling a brick.

By Wednesday, 6 March, the "Big Shanty" had been moved as far as State Street, but work was suspended because of an afternoon

deluge of rain. The house now occupied the entire width of Grove Street. Questions arose as to whether trees would have to be removed to make room for the "wings" which extended over the curb. James Moran, the contractor, could not be located to answer these questions. It was certain that changes would have to be made with telephone poles, but the question of evading trees seemed puzzling. Whether the huge building would "tack" like a sailboat to save the trees or whether it would stick to the straight and narrow was problematic.

On Friday, 8 March, a special meeting of the aldermen was called by indignant residents of Grove Street, to prohibit cutting the trees. The house was listed as 44' wide, but the top of the house was 50' wide and the street 49' wide. The residents felt that a permit to cut the trees was not properly advertised. After all the arguments were presented, Alderman Burbank made a motion: "Mr. G.E.L. Badlam shall be allowed to proceed with moving the building and the cutting of the trees shall be supervised by the commissioner of public works".

The protestors spoke of getting an injunction to prohibit cutting the trees and thus came the prospect of the building remaining where it stood—at the intersection of State and Grove Streets—for some time.

As the owner of the house, Mr. Badlam said that to save the trees he would order the entire bay window on the west side to be cut off. When this decision was made, it was said the injunction would not be pursued.

By Saturday, 9 March, the shovel was digging up Curtis' old house foundation while workmen were hacking away at the bay window. The house remained parked in the middle of Grove Street while the shovel excavated the site at 28 Merchants Row for the \$250,000 two-story building for the Montgomery Ward Company of Chicago.

Regardless of what was to happen to the 24-room, 46-year old Curtis house, now parked in the middle of Grove Street, about 1200 feet north of State Street, one thing was certain—the huge frame structure would not be moved back onto its old foundation.

Meantime carpenters were removing an "el" on the west side of the Curtis house. The removal of the bay windows, cupola, porch and other projections on the west side would make it possible to "wiggle" the structure up the street and not damage any trees.

On Tuesday, 12 March, perspectives changed. "It seems as though the Curtis house is growing wider and the street is growing more narrow." Mr. Badlam made this remark about the latest development concerning the Curtis house. "We are removing the tower and a bay window on the east side, and the house should make progress

without a hitch." Somewhat akin to "The man without a country" the Curtis house, now in the middle of Grove Street, seemed to be a "house without a home"—it had not moved one-inch in one week. When the "discombobulated" house did move, the towers remained standing by the side of the road as no plans had been made for them.

On Wednesday, 13 March, after six days of "marking time" the huge Curtis home resumed its long trek up Grove Street early in the morning. With the two wings sawed off it made good progress.

By evening the house was located a short distance beyond Williams Street, a few rods from State Street. Parked neatly on either side of the roadway, stood two three-story wings, topped with towers. The house had been pulled out from between them and they stood like two gruesome sentinels guarding Grove Street. Like jettisoned cargo, the two offending "towers" of the much-discussed Curtis house were cast aside, while the "main ship" went perambulating down Grove Street to drop anchor at Library Avenue.

Even though cast overboard, in true nautical fashion, the towers were lashed to the mast - except in this case the "masts" were trees on respective sides of Grove Street. As the trees swayed in the wind the "towers" swayed with them, giving a weird aspect to the whole scene.

While rain had much to do with suspending the work, the main house had progressed as far as Library Avenue. Electric wires crossing Grove Street at that intersection seemed to have been another cause for the halt.

When interviewed about the delay, contractor James Moran said, "This is getting like a game of chess. First I move - and then the other fellow does. The rain will have to stop, the wires will have to be readjusted; then it will be my turn again." Morgan was asked whether he had encountered similar difficulties before and he commented that "No two difficulties are exactly alike. Plenty of trouble of one kind or another comes in this moving business. The time has taken its course, but I'll come through smiling."

Two amusing sidelights were evident. Where pedestrians were forced to walk around the "discombobulated" towers, they had to travel on duckboards. Where the sides were removed, spectators could see gas lighting fixtures and electric lamp shades attached to chandeliers. So gentle had been the progress that these delicate pieces of glass had not been broken.

On Thursday, 21 March, the Curtis house was expected to settle on its haunches for a long, long rest. The towers and bay windows would catch up with the building later.

When the foundation was dug for the new location of the house on the corner of Grove Street and Park Avenue, the building was to face



At first all went well for contractor John Moran of Framingham, Massachusetts. As the house nearly reached the Williams Street corner, it encountered problems with the trees on the sides of Grove Street. This view is from the north.



The concerns of the neighbors for their trees were alleviated by owner George Badlam's decision to cut the bay windows off each side of the house. This view from the north shows the house proceeding beyond Williams Street.



Once the bays of the house had been removed, the towers were lashed to neighboring trees to support their lonely watch. Their precarious position was subject to the winds of March. This view is from the south.

Park Avenue. There was a delay in placing the house on the foundation when it was discovered that the foundation had been placed so that the front faced Grove Street. The house was squared around and slowly lowered to a point 20 inches above the foundation lines as two ten-inch layers of marble blocks had to be quickly put in place. Then the house was settled on its haunches facing Grove Street.

On Saturday, 23 March, one of the two towers belonging to the Curtis house resumed its journey to the intersection of Grove Street and Park Avenue. The other tower would be moved on the following Monday. What was supposed to be a 30-hour journey from site to site for the big house had actually taken 21 days.

Mr. Curtis' "fine" house has stood "on its haunches" through the years, first as the Healthatorium convalescent home; then as an apartment house and later as the P.J. McDonald Funeral Home and in more recent years as Tedesco Funeral Home and back again to a family home.

Construction at the former site of the Curtis house continued on the \$125,000 Montgomery Ward building. The new building was constructed by Fred H. Remington, a Merchants Row contractor. It was 62 feet wide and 122 feet long with a floor space of 24,000 square feet. The construction of the building was of brick and tile, with a terra cotta front. Mr. Badlam stated that the store front was one of the most unusual ever built in Rutland and would add greatly to the attractiveness of upper Merchants Row. Two entrances from Merchants Row gave access to the building, with the latest type of display windows on the first and second floors. On the first floor a mezzanine floor 61 by 40 feet was constructed, with a ceiling 19 feet high. Mr. Badlam expected the building to be finished in August and that the Montgomery Ward Company would be moving their goods in by July. However, the store did not open until 1 October 1929.

The Montgomery Ward Company rented the building from Mr. Badlam for 18 years and on 6 September 1946 the Marr Holding Corporation bought the building from Mr. Badlam. Montgomery Ward continued to occupy the building for many more years. The building has had various occupants over the years, but still stands as a beautiful example of Art Deco architecture at 28 Merchants Row.

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RUTLAND DIRECTORY - 1930

The two-story Montgomery Ward & Company art deco style building was completed in the fall of 1929. The store opened 1 October 1929. Montgomery Ward rented from Mr. Badlam for 18 years.



*The old Curtis house, now located at 125 Grove Street,
has served as a convalescent home and a funeral home.
Today it is a residence with apartments.*